

Council members want to add \$300K for adult English

■ Money would pay for teachers, classrooms and aim to reduce waiting lists

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STAFF WRITER

A \$300,000 proposal is one step toward moving 2,200 people off the county's waiting list for adult English language classes and into the classroom, two County Council members said Monday.

The proposed addition to the county's fiscal 2007 operating budget, announced by Councilman Thomas E. Perez and Councilwoman Marilyn J. Praisner, is aimed at eliminating the waiting list over the next several years.

It would increase the county's investment in adult English language classes by 30 percent, from \$1 million to \$1.3 million. The money would pay for new teachers and their training, materials and classroom rentals.

The initiative would create seats for 600 adults to learn English, at a cost of \$524 per student, during fiscal 2007, which begins July 1.

The council members did not offer details on how to pay for the plan, saying those discussions would be part of the budget process. The County Council will approve the county's fiscal 2007 operating budget on May 25.

"We shouldn't be the only one doing it," said Perez (D-Dist. 5) of Takoma Park. "With this investment, county government will be on par with the federal investment. There's something wrong with that picture when county government is on par with the federal investment and is four times larger than the state investment. We need equal partnership at the federal and state level."

Perez was part of a state panel that in December called for Maryland to spend \$26.5 million to expand adult education over the next four or five years, including \$5 million for the first year.

A bill introduced by Sen. Patrick J. Hogan proposed the funding formula laid out by the report, but only \$1.5 million was passed this year.

Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) on Tuesday signed a law that adds \$1.5 million for adult literacy in the fiscal 2008 budget. That is in addition to \$1.5 million that the state approved last year for fiscal 2007.

"I think it was tough for a lot of people to swallow after we increased funding for literacy last year," said Hogan (D-Dist. 39) of Montgomery Village.

Del. Sheila E. Hixson (D-Dist. 20) of Silver Spring, who sponsored the House version of the bill, also introduced a bill seeking tax credits for businesses that provide English language classes to employees. The bill failed.

Working with start-up companies whose owners are foreign-born, Rich Thometz, who owns Hailey Development LLC in Burtonsville, said he has come to realize how

HOW TO HELP

To learn more about adult English language classes, or to learn how to become an adult literacy teacher, go to www.m-calesol.org, call Mary Freeman at 301-562-5517 or write Mary.Freeman@montgomerycollege.edu.

HEARING SET

The County Council's Education Committee will discuss adult literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages at 2 p.m. Friday in the County Council Building at 100 Maryland Ave. in Rockville.

important English is to his industry.

"Most important to me as a small-business owner who rose up on his own, I feel very strongly that English is the key empowerment tool in the construction industry towards individual betterment of quality of life — to develop better pay, better benefits and also formation of your own business," he said.

Thometz sits on the advisory board for the Montgomery County Coalition for Adult Literacy and ESOL, whose 50 providers teach about 16,000 people a year.

The coalition, which was established by Montgomery College in November 2004 and plans to spin off an independent nonprofit organization next year, would receive the \$300,000 in county money and distribute it to providers.

Providers include community-based nonprofits, churches, businesses, government programs, health care organizations and colleges.

Ten of the providers say they will be able to offer more classes if they get more money, said Mary Freeman, who oversees the coalition.

Montgomery College is the county's largest provider of adult English language classes. The college provides seats for about 14,700 students each year and has a waiting list of more than 600.

A bill introduced by Sen. Ida G. Ruben (D-Dist. 20) of Silver Spring and signed by Ehrlich on Tuesday increases the state grant amount to community colleges for full-time ESOL students from \$2.5 million to \$6 million.

Hogan said he expects to see other Maryland counties follow Montgomery's lead.

"You take the nonprofits, you take the county money, and the federal money and the state money and you can start to chip away at this waiting list," Hogan said.

Praisner said she would fight for the money in this and future budgets. "It's common sense," said Praisner (D-Dist. 4) of Calverton. "It is not only the present of Montgomery County. It is the future of Montgomery County."